

Posted on June 25, 2015 by Abington Journal

## Maryknoll Junior Seminary Class of 1965 visits former home at Summit University

News, Top Stories



CLARKS SUMMIT — Konrad Kammerer stood looking out at the view of the Abingtons from the iconic bell tower at Summit University and smiled.

“We used to say this was God’s country up here,” he said.

Kammerer was one of nine classmates of the Maryknoll Junior Seminary graduating Class of 1965 that reunited June 20 after 50 years to tour their former school and home, now Summit University.

Before Summit University and Baptist Bible College, the Maryknoll Fathers, or the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, opened a seminary in the early 1900s on the picturesque 179 acres on the outskirts of Clarks Summit, formerly housed in what is now Buckingham Hall and Jackson Hall of Summit University.

“They represent an important piece of history for our community,” said Vice President for Communications and External Relations Mel Walker, who lead the campus tour for the Maryknoll Class of 1965.

The “Venard” is the school’s unofficial name, according to an article in Maryknoll Magazine from 1964. The main building was incorporated as Venard Apostolic Seminary, named after French missionary Saint Jean-Théophane Vénard, and was one of three Maryknoll junior seminaries.

Summit University retired library director David McClain moved into Jackson Hall with his wife Janet in April 1968, the week the university bought the property.

According to McClain, the current Jackson Hall and Buckingham Hall, which now houses the university’s music department, were the only buildings on campus when the class of 1965 attended. Construction began on the main building in 1919 and concluded in 1929.

“They’ve done a marvelous job modernizing the main building,” said Dr. George Fry, a member of the class of 1965 and co-organizer of the 50th reunion.

### **Class of 1965**

Nine of the original 15 members of the graduating class traveled back to the Abingtons from as far as Georgia, Indiana, New Jersey, Ohio, and Florida to reminisce about their time at Maryknoll Junior Seminary.

“We really didn’t stay in touch with each other, so it was a bit of a detective game getting in touch with everyone. It wasn’t like you go to a high school and your family is living in the area,” Fry said.

“We came from all over the east coast. That’s why we are scattered all over now.”

A few members of the class mentioned they had visited over the years, but it was Fry’s first time visiting since the late 1960s. He explained Maryknoll Junior Seminary was closed after the Second Vatican Council decided to eliminate high school seminaries.

“A lot of people that went here got great foundations for lives of service, but they never went all the way to the priesthood,” said Fry.

The historical significance of the decade the students attended Venard was also influential on the class's experiences.

Fry recalled he and the others were on a 50-mile hike to Elk Mountain the day one of the most significant events in history took place while at Maryknoll — the day President John F. Kennedy was shot.

“They were installing a new generator at the school so they gave us lunches, told us there wouldn't be power at the school, and to go ahead and hike,” Fry said laughing.

“We could have been the last people in the United States to find out what was going on. It was such an important day in American history and we kind of missed out on it because we were all out hiking,” he said in good humor.

Fry also said at least three members of classmates had full careers in the military as a result of the times.

“As we were graduating the Vietnam War was going on, so a lot of our class had an affiliation with the military because of the war and the draft,” he said. “It's been interesting to see the journeys everyone has taken.”

### **Memories on campus**

On campus in 1965, Jackson Hall housed the students' chapel, library, dormitories, an infirmary, study hall, and more as the students lived and worked on the campus grounds. Near what is now Buckingham Hall, there was also an apple orchard and farm where the students worked harvesting apples and raising pigs and Black Angus.

“I had a picture of myself in a magazine in the pig pens on the farm when I was in high school,” Fry said. During the winter months, the students and others from the area would ice skate on the pond.

The current Murphy Memorial Library in Jackson Hall previously housed the students' chapel, where the original stone columns tower over reading chairs and tables where wooden pews once sat. “From an aerial view, you can see the chapel is in the shape of a cross,” McClain said.

Walking into the library, now Assistant District Attorney for Westmorland County, Pa. Larry Koening said, “See the Latin in scripted in the archway.” Latin was the school's specialty.

The group wandered in and out of hallways and classrooms, noting which rooms were different and which were still similar. Some classrooms still retain the original black slate blackboards, and class members joked about dissection days in the science lab where the students took biology, which is still used as a science lab today.

John Wildner said the days the students had to dissect anything that “the formaldehyde would spread through the whole building.”

“There was a tradition,” novelist Dr. Ray Gleason recalled. “The day you dissected a frog they always served spaghetti. You could smell the formaldehyde through the hall. You would watch people go green as they tried to eat.”

Different rooms each held different recollections of the group, from writing letters home to family on Sunday mornings, to playing basketball in the gym, or even baseball on the field that still exists behind Jackson Hall.

Classmates jested about their teachers and other students, and the awful smoke. The former recreation room which is now another floor of the library, used to be filled with ping pong tables and, yes, smoke. “It was like a rite of passage,” Gleason said, “But you had to get permission from your parents.”

Outside the library entrance is still a small counter that opens up to a storage space Gleason said used to be a little store where students could buy hair tonic and candy bars. “It’s still got the old counter here,” he said as he ran his hands over the near hundred-year-old frame. “I think you could even buy cigarettes here,” he laughed.

Upstairs, the class of 1965 took photos in front of academic offices that were once the Blessed Virgin Mary Dorm, and got a rare view of the Abingtons when the tour led the students up two narrow spiral staircases to the bell tower.

That was when Kammerer recalled his days in the Radio Club, in the bell tower and the antenna used for the school’s radio station, K3KSQ.

Looking over the edge, Wildner mapped the route from the class free day parades where classes competed to win a day off from school, or free day. “Each class would have to create a float and dress up in costumes and parade around the building. We took the farm wagons, the same ones we would harvest the apples with, to make the floats.”

While Maryknoll Junior Seminary Venard may no longer exist, the school’s memory and legacy still carry on through the memories of its graduates, and its place in the history of Summit University and the Abingtons.

“We were just learning and growing together a long time ago,” Fry said. “This was it. This was our world.”